

CHASING MORE

A Coaching Paradox

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A senior executive I worked with during the pandemic was known, and well rewarded, for always exceeding targets. His approach, style and unyielding pressure on his team had them in an active revolt and he feared missing targets for the first time in his career. In one of our sessions, I asked him the question: *what's enough?*

I had another client who was weighing the pros and cons of applying for a promotion in her large organization. She told me that applying for this promotion was expected by her boss and her boss' boss and was the career path to a senior leadership role. At the same time, this new position would take her away from the people and work she really enjoyed and demand more travel and time away from her family. I asked her the same question: *what's enough?*

I calculate that I've asked this deceptively simple question of clients hundreds of times in my career. Most stumble over it. Many change the subject and don't even attempt to answer it. I often get a look as if I just said something in a foreign language they don't understand. It's almost an un-thinkable question.

I do understand. We human beings aren't individually or collectively use to, trained, or in the habit of declaring our satisfaction or living in a state of enough-ness. We are collectively programmed and personally addicted to more, and worse, we attach our identities and our worth to getting the more we are aiming for.

There's absolutely no blame or judgment here! The idea of more is programmed into our psyche from birth, built into almost every conversation we have in our daily living. It's become the measure for how we're doing in our own lives, in our organizations and families, and even how we're doing as a nation. It is in the collective air, metaphorically, that we breathe.

We are told every day, by everyone - by advertisers, the media, social media, bosses, friends, family, etc. - that we aren't enough, don't have enough or haven't done enough. Much too often we believe it. That belief then determines the actions we take, which originating from a false narrative of lack, doesn't lead us to make the best choices.

A Coaching Paradox

A primary aim of coaching is to support the client in achieving their goals or desired outcomes. That could be a new career, better leadership skills, more harmonious relationships, financial gain, etc. In achieving the goal, the client believes that they will be better off. We all believe that. We human beings are wired to think that getting the thing we say we want will bring us happiness or satisfaction.

At the same time, our inability to be satisfied with where we are now contributes to our striving for more and traps us into an endless loop of dissatisfaction, insufficiency, and pursuit.

It's a paradox so the solution isn't about us not desiring or not wanting more. I'm not sure that's even possible for us human beings. And, our drive to do and be more produces good things – innovations, breakthroughs in technology, medicine, etc., solutions to our sticky problems, personal meaning and fulfillment. Plus, going for more can be the fun stuff of life. To want to grow your capabilities and take on that next level of responsibility at work; to want kids and create a wonderful and nurturing home environment for them to blossom; to want to travel and see the gifts this world has to offer; to do meaningful work in which you get to take care of what matters to you.

At the same time, our inability to be satisfied is one of the greatest sources of suffering in our life. It's a guaranteed formula for overwhelm, stress, poor decision making, conflict, over-consumption, and ultimately the depletion of our planet's finite resources. Our perpetual quest for more drives us to over-work, to over-criticize self and others, and to overlook what's good about right now in favor of a potentially 'better' tomorrow.

Our challenge, our work as coaches (and also as human beings), is to develop our capability to hold the paradox. To hold, to be with, to live in and take action from a state of enough-ness and satisfaction *while also* acknowledging our desires to create and generate a better future.

From Coaching 101, we know that we can't change what we can't or won't see. By questioning our clients' ability to be satisfied, by exploring the beliefs they have about their enough-ness, we shed light on the pervasive cultural myth that more is always the better path, that the goal (whatever that is) will finally bring satisfaction.

Yes, we coaches are in profession that helps people do, have, and be more. We also have a responsibility to support clients to address the suffering that might be resulting from their unchallenged pursuit of more or the costs of playing the game of more that they don't see or didn't consciously choose.

With awareness and practice we can replace striving with satisfaction, replace the not-enough story with enough-for-now. We *can* learn to live satisfied in our seemingly insatiable world. We can

learn to live with more ease within the paradox. We aren't condemned to live in the perpetual trance of insufficiency.

Terrie is a Master Certified Coach and has an Advanced Certification in Team Coaching. Together with Pamela Richarde, MCC, she teaches the [DISRUPTIVE COACH MASTERCLASS](#), a 22.5 CCEU program for experienced coaches that challenges the myths, assumptions and beliefs that limit what's possible for our clients and ourselves.